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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iraq

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post cited official Israeli assessments according to which Syria does not believe PM Ehud Olmert's public statements of

reassurance that Israel has no intention of attacking Syria, and that the latter is genuinely concerned about an Israeli preemptive attack. On Sunday Yediot reported that a few days ago Israeli sources heard from Syrian and Lebanese sources at a secret meeting in the presence of European and American representatives that Syrian President Bashar Assad has been persuaded to drag Israel into a war of attrition. Yediot quoted a senior IDF official as saying that Syria's anti-aircraft rocket deployment is the "densest in the world." On Sunday Ha'aretz quoted a GOI source in Jerusalem as saying on Saturday that Syria is still not a satellite of Iran and that it can be extricated from an Iranian bear-hug."

The Jerusalem Post quoted PA officials in Ramallah as saying on Sunday that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas plans to hold legislative and presidential elections -- both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip -- within six months. On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that a group of Palestinian businessmen and academics disillusioned with Fatah and Hamas, has decided to establish a new political party to run in the next PA election. The Jerusalem Post quoted a member of the group as saying that they want to "set up a Palestinian version of the Israeli Kadima Party, which attracted voters from both Likud and Labor."

Israel Radio quoted the British House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee as saying that refusing to speak to Hamas is counterproductive and that efforts should be made to form a new unity Palestinian government. The radio also reported that the committee advocated engaging Hizbullah.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that the Palestinian police recently resumed law-enforcement activities in Area B of the West Bank, where the IDF is responsible for security. On Sunday Maariv reported that on Saturday Hamas announced that for the first time it was forming a naval arm.

Maariv and other media reported on a new proposal by President Shimon Peres in which Israel would free all Palestinian prisoners in stages over five years instead of conceding land.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz quoted Tom Lantos, the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as saying in Jerusalem on Sunday that he saw little chance of a real breakthrough on a Palestinian state, either at a US-sponsored conference this year or before the end of President Bush's term. The Jerusalem Post reported that Lantos warned that the premature removal of West Bank checkpoints would lead to violence as long as the PA lacked the capability to secure the area.

Leading media reported that film from a closed-circuit police camera that captured Friday's shoot-out in the Old City of Jerusalem between an Israeli Arab and two security officers counters the family's claim that the slain assailant was innocent. Ha'aretz noted that the film was incomplete.

Ha'aretz cited a special report submitted to the Winograd Commission, which recommends that the Foreign Ministry should be reorganized to allow it to have more of an impact on the decision-making processes involved in forging Israel's foreign policy. The report was compiled by the Re'ut Institute, a nonpartisan research organization, after a series of interviews with past and present Foreign Ministry and defense officials. The report concluded: "The Foreign Ministry does not have the skill, authority or minimum requirements to deal with matters of national security."

Leading media reported that on Sunday the cabinet approved the proposed 2008 state budget, at some 312 billion shekels (around USD 72.7 billion) the largest in the nation's history. Twenty-one ministers voted in favor, and five ministers, including Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz and the four Shas ministers voted against, as expected.

Ha'aretz's Zvi Bar'el reported from Sulaimaniya, northern Iraq, that the Kurds are "building an island of calm in Iraq's inferno."

On Sunday leading media reported that New York authorities took extra counterterrorism precautions over the weekend in response to what they said was an unsubstantiated radiological threat to the city reported by the Israeli Web site, DEBKAF (www.debka.com).

Over the weekend major media quoted the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's physician as saying that Arafat's blood contained HIV, but that poison killed him.

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday American billionaire Sheldon Adelson pledged USD 60 million for the Taglit-birthright israel project, which sponsors trips to Israel for Jewish youths who have never visited the country. Ha'aretz said that 20 Congressmen from the US Republican party accompanied Adelson during his trip to Israel. Adelson reportedly tries to spread "hawkish" views to congressional delegations. In an unrelated story, The Jerusalem Post reported that during his presidential campaign, former Republican Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee is drawing inspiration from his visit to Yad Vashem.

Ha'aretz quoted the British weekly The Sunday Telegraph as saying on Sunday that Hizbullah is purchasing large plots of land from Christians and Druze in southern Lebanon to improve its military capabilities in preparation for another war with Israel.

Ha'aretz reported that sources in Israel told the newspaper that Jordan is considering dropping its plans for the Dead Sea canal because of cost considerations.

Major media quoted Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu as saying over the weekend that a low turnout in his party's primary this week might increase the strength of extremist contender Moshe Feiglin.

Ha'aretz reported that Japanese FM Taro Aso, who will start a visit to the region today, is expected to declare renewed aid to the PA. The Jerusalem Post reported that the FMs of Israel, the PA, Jordan, and Japan are scheduled to meet on Wednesday in Jericho to launch a joint economic project called the "corridor for peace and security."

The Jerusalem Post quoted a GOI official as saying on Sunday that Israel will not take up with Egypt its tactic of stopping refugees along the border, despite growing calls from human right organizations that cite the Egyptians' "brutal tactics."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Prof. Mark Pepys, a leading British academic and member of the University and College Union (UCU) warned over the weekend that the UCU's call for an academic boycott of Israel could seriously damage working relationships between UK and US universities and colleges.

Maariv cited Israel research stating that the education of Israeli students in the US costs Israel USD 2 billion.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on September 9, the American rock group Arrested Development, along with The Black Eyed Peas and The Commitments, will perform in Jerusalem in a concert dubbed "Jerusalem Rocks!"

1. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "[Prime Minister Ehud Olmert] must restrain the Defense Minister and remind him that the overall and supreme responsibility for Israel's peace and security policy is in the hands of the government he heads."

Political commentator Shalom Yerushalmi wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "[Defense Minister Ehud] Barak is right. It will take years, in which a real and well-grounded process will be demanded here."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Hamas is plainly playing for time and judging that Abbas cannot survive long in office."

Shalom Dichter, joint general manager of Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel, wrote in Maariv: "Every

attempt to use the Arab citizens of Israel in exchanges of citizens, territories or both, assumes from the start that these citizens are not wanted by the state."

Intelligence affairs reporter Ronen Bergman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Israel needs ... an agent today more than ever, who will give not only technical information on troop sizes, weapons acquisitions and upgrading capabilities, but who is able to decipher the leader's intentions."

Block Quotes:

I. "Restrain the Defense Minister"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (8/12): "The more talks accelerate between Israel and the Palestinians ahead of the international conference and the formulation of new diplomatic plans, the more reports crop up of objections by Labor Party Chairman and Defense Minister Ehud Barak to changing the 'no-partner' policy. In a statement to party members and the media Friday, Barak quickly denied reports that he had considered the meeting between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas 'air, or if you will, atmosphere.' He also denied saying that the talks before the renewal of negotiations for a final-status agreement were nothing but "fantasies" and that he objected to withdrawing from territory before Israel had the means to intercept various types of missiles.... Barak's actions and failures since joining the government confirm the reports by senior journalists of his devotion to the policy that states the Palestinian side is unable to deal with those who do not want peace and/or are not interested in a two-state solution. This assumption has spawned a security policy that emphasizes security needs and ignores civilian ones.... Barak dictates his outlook on the most critical issue in Israel as if he is at the top of the pyramid. If Olmert sees Abbas as a partner and seriously intends to strengthen the Abbas camp by renewing negotiations on a permanent-status solution, he must restrain the Defense Minister and remind him that the overall and supreme responsibility for Israel's peace and security policy is in the hands of the government he heads."

II. "Barak's Sense"

Political commentator Shalom Yerushalmi wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (8/13): "After the problematic disengagement process, which aroused a great deal of doubt, there is no one who can carry out a real historical move, if at all. Barak knows what happened to him when he made the most generous proposal to date to the Palestinians, and following this received an Intifada and was forced to step down from power. Olmert, of course, is not the person who can demolish settlements and raise a Palestinian flag on the Temple Mount (in keeping to President [Shimon Peres's] plan, as reported). With single-digit percentages of support, he can barely evacuate a trailer or an antenna. The problem is also the partner. After disengagement, most of the public will find it difficult to give up even isolated settlements without receiving anything real in return. Barak is right. It will take years, in which a real and well-grounded process will be demanded here, including a convincing Palestinian renunciation of the right of return, and not promises on paper.... The problem is also within the army, where pockets of [right-leaning] rebelliousness are revealed time and time again."

III. "Donors Beware"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (8/12): "It emerged late last week that 3,500 Hamas 'security-force' salaries had been paid by the Fatah-led Salam Fayyad government in Ramallah. At first this was passed off as computer error, corrected only after 1,000 of the beneficiaries had managed to withdraw the money from their bank accounts in Gaza. Now 'investigations' are reported in progress. The latest version is that a higher-up in the PA Finance Ministry may have been bought off by Hamas and remitted the funds without authorization.... Indeed, persistent buzz exists about a possible rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas.... Hamas is plainly playing for time and judging that Abbas cannot survive long in office.... It becomes immaterial whether Fatah couldn't or wouldn't live up to its undertakings. The end result is what counts. Money is fungible. If the Hamas leadership is freed from

paying wages to its underlings, it can spend its money on its favorite nefarious causes. The direct consequence of this particular episode is that PA benefactors -- the US, EU and Israel included -- have indirectly helped finance Hamas terrorism. Donors beware."

IV. "A Nightmare Called Peace"

Shalom Dichter, joint general manager of Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel, wrote in Maariv (8/12): "In light of the resumption of talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, we have heard the news that the President of Israel has a new political plan (which the Prime Minister repudiates for the present). Under the headline 'Return of 95 to 100 Percent of the West Bank,' it turns out that the possibility of revoking the citizenship of the inhabitants of the Arab communities along the Green Line by transferring them to the Palestinian Authority has once again been raised. This is not an official part of the new document but rather an 'oral tradition' from President Peres's advisers, but the voice is the chilling voice of [far-Right cabinet minister Avigdor] Lieberman. Every attempt to use the Arab citizens of Israel in exchanges of citizens, territories or both, assumes from the start that these citizens are not wanted by the state."

1V. "What Is Going On Inside Bashar's Head"

Intelligence affairs reporter Ronen Bergman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (8/13): "For years, [during Hafez Assad's rule], Israel's intelligence community operated, or at least thought it was operating, through the Mossad, a high-placed agent in the heart of the Syrian establishment..... Israel needs such an agent today more than ever, who will give not only technical information on troop sizes, weapons acquisitions and upgrading capabilities, but who is able to decipher the leader's intentions. This, of course, is without disregarding the main lesson of the Yom Kippur War, according to which even if we are certain that there is full and reliable information about the leader's intentions, we should pay it no heed as soon as the enemy army has sufficient troops and readiness to go to war. The current state of affairs in the Syrian army is not similar to its deployment prior to the Yom Kippur War -- far from it. If what the Syrian army has been undergoing in recent months can be considered as preparations for war, then the IDF's buildup of strength in the last decade, which is 20 times as large as that of the Syrians, can certainly be considered the same. There is no debate that the Syrian army is undergoing a fundamental change. The question is what the nature of this change is, and where Bashar Assad is headed."

12. Iraq:

Summary:

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israel must be interested in the United States withdrawing from the battle right now, when its standing has not suffered any more damage than it already has."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz from Sulaimaniya, Northern Iraq: "After four years of American presence in Iraq, the amicable dialogue between the U.S. and the Iraqi Kurds is growing increasingly discordant."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Superfluous Israeli Advice"

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (8/13): "The neo-conservatives in Washington have learned nothing from the lessons of the past 15 years in Eastern Europe. In a combination of arrogance and

ignorance they believed that Saddam's fall would herald the rise of a democracy by its own accord, of course with the help of American spears. What they did not take into account is the fact that the sudden introduction of democratic procedures into a society that lacks the most basic infrastructures will inevitably lead to chaos. What the ideologues in Washington forgot is that even if democracy is a recipe for stability, the processes of democratization can in fact lead to prolonged instability.... Israel must be extremely cautious about being seen as the spearhead of an attempt to find a solution through bullying.... Israel must be interested in the United States withdrawing from the battle right now, when its standing has not suffered any more damage than it already has: America's global status is without a doubt one of the foundations of Israel's strategic power. It will not be built up by Israeli advice that will not change the American position and will only exacerbate the hostility to Israel in the Arab countries and in Western public opinion. Even if right now it is difficult for Israel to progress toward peace with the Palestinians, it must not come across as the driving force behind Washington's bullying obduracy that is unaware that it has reached the end of the road in Iraq."

II. "Washington Has Forgotten Them"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz from Sulaimaniya, Northern Iraq (8/13): "It began as a natural alliance, a political love affair. But after four years of American presence in Iraq, the amicable dialogue between the U.S. and the Iraqi Kurds is growing increasingly discordant. Beyond the culture gap, Iraqi Kurdistan is beginning to feel betrayed by its American allies.... The latest example of this was seen in the words of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Referring to the rights of the Iraqi Kurds, Rice said that the Kurds' best security guarantee comes not from the United States, but from the Iraqi constitution.... The Kurds dream of seceding, but this is unlikely to happen. Any sign of Kurdish independence triggers a Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian backlash. Tehran, Istanbul, and Damascus are afraid of an Iraqi precedent that would agitate their domestic Kurdish communities. And so, Washington is striving to make Kurdistan dependent on the Iraqi government and neighboring countries by withholding assistance for a separate Kurdish industrial infrastructure. The assumption is that the Kurds will accept this and not revolt."

JONES